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Security Council

Fifty-ninth year

Provisional

5055th meeting

Tuesday, 12 October 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Sir Emyr Jones Parry	(United Kingdom)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Katti
	Angola	Mr. Constantino
	Benin	Mr. Adechi
	Brazil	Mr. Tarrisse da Fontoura
	Chile	Mr. Maquieira
	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	France	Mr. Poirier
	Germany	Mr. Pleuger
	Pakistan	Mr. Khalid
	Philippines	Mr. Mercado
	Romania	Mr. Suseanu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Konuzin
	Spain	Mr. Yáñez-Parnuevo
	United States of America	Mrs. Patterson

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

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04-54608 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Afghanistan, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Hédi Annabi, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Annabi to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Hédi Annabi, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Annabi: Last Saturday, 9 October, Afghans went to the polls to elect a President, for the first time in their history. That these elections should have taken place at all — against the backdrop of extremist threats, the very difficult terrain, adverse weather conditions in several provinces and other challenges — is in itself an achievement. But the impressive participation, the enthusiasm and pride of the women and men voting for the first time and the peaceful and orderly environment in which the electoral operation unfolded have made it a special event that augers well for the journey of the Afghans towards democracy.

Many international observers feared that the elections would be marred by violence. The fact that they were not is a tribute not only to the Afghan voters but also to the national army and police, who provided a safe environment with the assistance of the international security forces.

The elections, of course, were not perfect. Members will no doubt have read about the trouble experienced with the application of indelible ink, about the allegations of intimidation and about other irregularities. But, while the results of the election itself will not be known for a while, the popular verdict on the process itself is overwhelmingly positive.

I would like to begin with a very general and preliminary account of the elections. In most ways, they were a well-run operation, given the constraints of geography and security. Almost every polling station was opened on time. Polling staff acted professionally and were properly equipped. There were no major security incidents and, remarkably, no Afghan voter was killed during the polling.

The reports we have heard so far from observers, monitors, special guests, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) staff in the field and individual Afghans reflect a high level of popular satisfaction with the conduct of the polling.

Initial estimates — and I stress that these are estimates — indicate a high turnout, despite poor weather conditions and a call by opposition candidates for a boycott, to which I will return in a moment.

The only serious problem that occurred during voting concerned the handling of the indelible ink. Polling stations were supplied with one of two products with which to ink voters' left thumbs: voter ink pens or ink sponge containers. Both products appear to have functioned satisfactorily when used properly. However, the voter ink pens could be confused with marker pens intended for marking ballot papers, and the ink sponge containers could be confused with a bottle of ink intended for replenishing stamp pads. It appears that polling officials did indeed confuse the products on many occasions. This

produced, in the early hours of polling, fast-flying rumours that the ink was in fact erasable and that the election was therefore compromised. Some polling staff decided to halt voting until they could receive clarification from the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB). The JEMB rapidly issued a decision that polling should continue, and it reissued instructions on how to properly use the ink. The problem was identified and resolved within the first hours of polling, and complaints had ceased by early afternoon. Voters continued to turn out in significant numbers throughout the day, and a number of polling sites actually extended their closing time from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Despite the resolution of the problem and the evident enthusiasm of voters, 15 opposition candidates, at about 2 p.m. on 9 October, issued a statement calling for the suspension of the polling and declaring that the results of the election would not be legitimate. They cited a multiplicity of alleged irregularities, including allegations that JEMB staff were instructing people to vote for President Karzai, that candidate and party agents had been barred from some polling stations and that blank ballot papers were being distributed.

The JEMB rejected that demand as unjustified and stated that to shut down voting on the basis of unproven allegations by candidates would deny the fundamental right to vote to those who had not yet reached the polling centres. The JEMB acknowledged in its statement that there had been some technical problems and allegations of other irregularities but reminded the candidates that a complaints mechanism existed and that they would be able to participate fully in the investigation of the complaints.

As polling went on without incident, voters increasingly stated their opposition to the boycott, and the position of those advocating the boycott weakened. The day after polling, a number of candidates began to suggest that they were not actually boycotting the election results but that they felt a strong need for an independent investigation into the alleged irregularities.

The JEMB took that issue seriously and requested UNAMA to nominate a panel of independent electoral experts to assist it in its investigations. The electoral law, it should be noted, empowers the JEMB to establish such a panel. Yesterday, 11 October, the Board announced the establishment of three-member panel that will fully investigate the candidates' protests and present recommendations to the JEMB for its adjudication. The Board asked the presidential candidates to submit their detailed complaints by 6 p.m. today, Kabul time.

I would like to focus for a moment on the question of security, given our longstanding and often-stated concern that the election presented a number of very vulnerable targets. In the end, security conditions on election day greatly exceeded our expectations. Nonetheless, there were some incidents. In several areas, particularly in the south and east, rockets were fired at or near polling centres. In the central highlands, there was a case of polling station workers being assaulted by voters who had attempted to engage in multiple voting. In Uruzgan province, insurgents destroyed a bridge linking one community to a village centre, with the aim of preventing people from travelling to the centre to vote. There were several reports of intimidation, though none so far is considered to have greatly affected the voting. Allegations are being processed, and, as I have already said, they will be investigated.

Credit must be given to the Electoral Security Operations Centre, which was established in cooperation with the JEMB and national and international security forces. That mechanism allowed intelligence from various sources to be pooled and shared, and it allowed particular threats to be responded to as necessary by the approximately 120,000 Afghan, coalition and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) forces that were present to provide security during the election. We are very grateful to ISAF and the coalition in particular for the additional forces that they deployed. Those forces gave Afghan voters confidence and surely deterred a number of incidents. We believe that we need to build on that success and that those forces should remain in Afghanistan until the parliamentary elections, scheduled to be held next spring, are over.

The presidential electoral process, of course, is not over, and attacks could still occur. Polling has ended, but a number of technical tasks remain to be performed. Ballot boxes are being transported to the counting centres in the eight main population centres of Afghanistan. Most have now arrived, despite some attacks on convoys, including one that killed three Afghan policemen in Uruzgan province. The reconciliation of votes is under way. That means that

the number of ballots in each ballot box is being checked against the number of people who appeared at the polling station and the number of ballots that were used at that station. Once reconciliation is complete, the counting of ballots will begin, in the presence of observers and party agents. We expect the counting process to continue for some two to three weeks. The results will be transmitted every hour to the Media Results Centre, where they will be published. Once the counting is completed, and if the JEMB concludes after its investigations that the irregularities reported did not affect the overall credibility of the election, the results will be announced.

An important part of the election was the out-of-country voting in Iran and Pakistan, conducted on behalf of the JEMB by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). There, as in Afghanistan, order was kept, voters turned out, and balloting took place under secure conditions. Initial estimates suggest that some 540,000 Afghans voted at the 1,657 polling stations set up in Pakistan, representing a satisfactory turnout of about 75 per cent. In Iran, an estimated 260,000 voters voted at 1,126 polling stations. That represents approximately 50 per cent of estimated eligible voters. Given the abbreviated time for public education in Iran, as well as the fact that in Iran — as opposed to Pakistan and Afghanistan — polling fell on a working day for many voters, that is also a satisfactory participation rate. With a total of about 800,000 Afghans voting outside Afghanistan, the out-of-country exercise represents the largest-ever refugee vote. This was organized in only 78 days. The IOM and, in particular, its teams in Pakistan and Iran deserve significant praise for that achievement.

I also want to seize this opportunity to commend the Governments of Iran and Pakistan for the commitment they have shown to the process.

An important element in enhancing the credibility of the election was the presence of observers. In Afghanistan, 5,321 domestic and 121 international observers were present on polling day. The European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe sent election support teams, both of which have issued generally positive preliminary statements. The participation of domestic observers through the Free and Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan was particularly welcome and we are pleased that the domestic observation effort was as thorough as it was.

Equally important for the credibility of the process was the presence of political party and candidate agents. There were 22,000 party agents and 52,000 candidate agents accredited, and agents were present in every province of Afghanistan. Many of those agents continued to observe the polling even after their candidates had called a boycott and requested them to leave the polling stations. The agents continue to play an active role in observing the counting process and by doing so have contributed to strengthening the credibility of the process.

As members know, before the election, much effort went into creating an environment in which a credible, meaningful election was possible. A list of the benchmarks to guide that effort was circulated to the Security Council in August last year. I would like to emphasize one of those benchmarks today: the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. It is clear that much more progress is needed on DDR before the parliamentary elections are held. At the same time, the electoral process itself has helped to add momentum to disarmament efforts.

A specific pre-election DDR framework was finalized through a presidential decree signed on 7 September. Additional momentum was gained from the requirement that all parties sever their links to military formations in order to be registered for the elections. As a result, the Ministry of Defence, as requested by the Joint Electoral Management Body on 10 August, appointed new and non-factional commanders to three core units affiliated with electoral candidates: President Karzai's running mate Khalili and presidential candidates Muhaqqiq and Dostum.

The political momentum generated by the electoral process has had an evident effect on the demobilization of soldiers, as well as on the defactionalization of military forces. By the end of September, about 5,480 soldiers had entered the DDR programme under the new plan, representing about 40 per cent more than had been disarmed since the programme started in October 2003. By election day, more than 22,500 personnel had been disarmed and 2,780 serviceable heavy weapons had been disabled or cantoned. That corresponds to 33 per cent of estimated actual personnel targets and to 68 per cent of the heavy weapons target.

Those results suggest that, just as disarmament is an important ingredient in the holding of credible

elections, the electoral process itself helps advance disarmament. That is one more reason to ensure that the international community continues to provide assistance to both processes, particularly in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for next spring. Planning and budgeting for the elections will begin shortly and the plans will be made available as soon as they are finalized.

In conclusion, I have tried to present some very preliminary observations on a process that is still under way. We should guard against complacency and be aware that difficult challenges continue to lie ahead, but the past few days — and first and foremost the patience, resilience and determination demonstrated by Afghan women and men — are a source of optimism that the election will result in achieving a central objective of the Bonn Agreement.

The President: Consultations among members of the Security Council continue on the text of a presidential statement. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussions.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.